Evening-prayer-Ma'ariv

Zadoq ben Aahron

Evening prayer - ערבית תפילה

Evening prayer is the prayer of the night. Jacob our father instituted it on his way from Be’er Sheva to Haran, as it is said (Genesis 28:11): “And he encountered (interpretation: and he prayed) at the place and lodged there because the sun had set.”

Adjusted corresponding to the limbs and fats of the sacrifices that were not burned during the day, which are burned and continue all night.

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Parts of the Prayer

On weekdays, they begin the evening prayer with the section: "And He, the Merciful One, will forgive iniquity...".

In Midrash Tanchuma it is brought, that at the time when the Temple was standing, no person would sleep in Jerusalem with sin in his hand, because the morning Tamid offering atoned for the sins of the night and the afternoon Tamid offering atoned for the sins of the day.

Therefore, they instituted that at the time of the evening prayer, we should pray to the Lord to forgive and pardon our sins.

There are those who have the custom to add: "A Song of Ascents, behold, bless the Lord...".

In prayer in public, the prayer leader says: “Bless the Lord who is blessed,” and the congregation responds: “Blessed is the Lord who is blessed forever and ever.”

One should not interrupt with speech from the recitation of “Bless the Lord, the blessed one” until the conclusion of the prayer.

Blessings “Kriyat Shema” in the prayer “Arvit” differ from those of “Shacharit”. After the recitation of Barechu and before “Kriyat Shema”, two blessings are recited, one “long” and one “short”.

The long one opens with “Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the universe, who by His word brings on evenings”, and concludes with “Blessed are You, Lord, who brings on evenings”.

The second, the short, opens with “Everlasting love”, and ends with “Blessed are You, Lord, who loves His people Israel”.

Afterwards, they recite the Shema. In the verse: “and you shall speak of them... when you lie down and when you rise up”, the commandment is written to recite the Shema twice every day, in the evening and in the morning.

The person must recite the Shema with great precision and meticulousness, and pronounce all the letters accurately. He must be careful that one syllable does not swallow another.

There should be a slight pause before a word whose beginning is similar to the end of the previous word, such as: “with all your heart”, “grass in your field”, “and you will perish quickly”, “the corner of the thread”, “you from the land” and others.

As well, one must be careful to read according to the rules of precision and pronunciation, to be precise with the letters that are dagesh and rafeh, and more.

The one who recites the Shema, needs to make heard to his ears the words that he expresses with his lips.

The person must intend in his heart that he is reciting the Shema, in order to fulfill the obligation of the commandment. He must understand the meaning of the words and intend them well.

In particular, one must intend in the first verse of the Shema reading. If one did not intend in this verse, one has not fulfilled one’s obligation.

We will note here the intention briefly: “Hear, O Israel” ((believe, O Israel)) that “the Lord” ((Master of all, was, is, and will be)) who is “our God” ((mighty, possessor of ability and possessor of all powers)), is “the Lord” ((Master of all, was, is, and will be)) “one” ((unique in His world and rules in the heavens and on the earth and in the four directions of the world)).

It is customary to recite the first verse of the Shema aloud, to awaken the intention, and likewise, it is customary to place the right hand on the eyes during the recitation of the first verse.

The verse: “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever” is said in a whisper. Also in this verse, one should carefully intend the meaning of the words.

In the three sections of the Shema reading, there are 245 words.

In order to complete them to 248 words, corresponding to the number of a person’s limbs, he will conclude the three sections of the Shema reading with the words: “The Lord your God is true,” and the prayer leader repeats and says aloud: “The Lord your God is true.”

According to the Ashkenazi custom, an individual reciting the Shema, says before the first verse the three words: “God, faithful King.”

The sons of the Eastern communities do not say before “Shema Yisrael” the words: “El Melech Ne’eman”. They are accustomed to repeat the words: “Hashem Elokeichem Emet”, even when they pray individually.

During the recitation of the first section of the Shema, he should not signal to others with his eyes or fingers and the like. It is forbidden to signal even for the purpose of a mitzvah.

In the second section of the recitation of Shema, it is permitted to hint for the sake of a commandment.

After the recitation of Shema, there are two short blessings: the first blessing opens with “True and Faithful” and concludes with “Blessed are You, Lord, Redeemer of Israel.” This blessing was instituted for the redemption of the future.

The second blessing opens with “Lay us down, our Father” and concludes with “Blessed are You, O Lord, who guards [His] people Israel forever.”

This blessing was instituted corresponding to the prayer that Israel prayed at the time when the Lord passed to smite Egypt, that they prayed to the Lord to fulfill His word not to allow the destroyer to come into their houses to smite.

There are communities abroad in which they add after the blessing “Hashkiveinu”, verses (("Blessed is the Lord forever, Amen and Amen...")) and the blessing “May our eyes see”.

In prayer in public, they say “Half Kaddish”, before the Shemoneh Esrei prayer.

A person who was late for the “Arvit” prayer in the synagogue, and upon arrival found the congregation already preparing for the “Amidah” prayer, he should pray the Amidah prayer with the congregation; and only after the Amidah prayer should he return and complete the recitation of the Shema and its blessings.

After the Amidah, they say Kaddish Titkabbal.

The sons of the Eastern communities are accustomed to say the chapter: “A Song of Ascents, I lift my eyes...” in the evening prayer and then the Mourner’s Kaddish and Barechu, before Aleinu Leshabeach.

At the conclusion of the prayer, we say the prayer “Aleinu Leshabeach” and afterwards the Mourner’s Kaddish and for Ashkenazim, Barechu.

Times of Prayer

Initially, one should recite the Shema of the evening immediately at the emergence of the stars, but it is permissible to delay it until midnight.

In retrospect, if he transgressed and recited the Shema after midnight, before dawn broke, he fulfilled the obligation of the commandment.

From the end of the time of the Mincha prayer - that is from the Plag HaMincha according to Rabbi Yehuda and from sunset according to the Sages - and the law is “whoever acts according to this one acts, and whoever acts according to that one acts” provided that he does not do according to both together, which is “two contradictions.”

The Ashkenazim are accustomed to wait about twenty minutes after the appearance of the stars. If they pray Maariv before sunset (like Rabbi Yehuda), they must be careful to recite the Shema again after the appearance of the stars.

End of its time: According to Rabbi Eliezer - until the end of the first watch (the first third of the night) and the law is not according to him, and according to Rabban Gamliel until dawn, and even the sages agree that its time is until dawn but they decreed until midnight to distance a person from transgression, therefore one must be careful to pray until midnight and if midnight has passed one still needs to pray the evening prayer if dawn has not yet risen.

Further on the times of prayer see in the entry times of the day.

Permission or Obligation

To the law “Evening prayer is optional,” and they disagreed on what this means: either to say that only if there is a passing commandment do they cancel the evening prayer for it, but for nothing it should not be canceled (Tosafot), or to say that if he has already removed his belt he is not obligated to rise and pray (Rosh according to the Jerusalem Talmud).

With that, one who accepts upon himself as an obligation - becomes obligated in it as an obligation, and according to certain opinions among the Rishonim, if he prayed it once, it becomes for him in the future as an obligation.

Before the Prayer

It is forbidden to begin eating or sleeping, starting from half an hour close to the time of the recitation of the Shema of the evening ((meaning: half an hour before the appearance of the stars)), until he recites the recitation of the Shema, because there is concern that the meal might extend or he might sink into prolonged sleep and not pray.

It is permitted to eat fruits, and likewise it is permitted to eat bread up to the measure of “an egg”. Sleeping is forbidden, even if his intention is for a small amount of sleep.

If he asked another person to remind him that he must pray, he is permitted to begin eating.